

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 03779 141834Z

64

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SUBJ: ELECTION DAY MINUS FIVE

1. SUMMARY. WITH FIVE DAYS TO GO, THE LIKELIHOOD IS FOR LIGHT PARTICIPATION IN THE EASTER SUNDAY MID-TERM ELECTIONS. THE BALLOTING IS EXPECTED TO BE ORDERLY, ALTHOUGH THE VOTE COUNT, DUE TO MANY FACTIONS INVOLVED, WILL BE UNDULY COMPLEX. THE LLERAS DRIVE FOR THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION SHOULD RECEIVE A BOOST, WHILE THE TURBAY CAMPAIGN APPEARS HEADED FOR A SET-BACK. THE CONSERVATIVES MAY SEE EVEN FURTHER REDUCTION OF THEIR VOTE WHILE THE SMALL, DISCIPLINED LEFTIST PARTIES SHOULD BENEFIT FROM THE LIGHT TURNOUT. FOR THE ANAPO MOVEMENT, FOUNDED BY THE LATE GENERAL ROJAS PINILLA, THE APRIL 18 ELECTION MAY BE THE END OF THE LINE. END SUMMARY.

2. WITH THE CAMPAIGNS FORMALLY CLOSED, COLOMBIANS ARE NOW AWAITING THE EASTER SUNDAY ELECTIONS WITH SOMETHING LESS THAN EAGER ANTICIPATION. SOME 10 TO 15 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION (AN ESTIMATED 30 PERCENT OF THE ELIGIBLE VOTERS) WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTIONS FOR DEPARTMENTAL AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS. THE SCANTY PARTICIPATION REFLECTS A NUMBER OF FACTORS INCLUDING THE TRADITIONAL COLOMBIAN ABSTENTION FROM MID-TERM BALLOTING. IN 1968 AND 1972, WITH GENERAL ROJAS' ANAPO MOUNTING ITS NEARLY SUCCESSFUL CHALLENGE TO THE NATIONAL FRONT SYSTEM, THE VOTER TURNOUT FOR THE MID-TERM ELECTIONS REMAINED IN THE 35-40 PERCENT RANGE.

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 03779 141834Z

THIS YEAR, WITH ONLY INTRA-PARTY FACTIONALISM AS THE DRAW, AND

WITH THE COINCIDENCE OF THE ELECTIONS AND EASTER SUNDAY (TRADITIONALLY AN OCCASION FOR TRAVEL BY THOSE WHO CAN AFFORD IT) THE TURNOUT IS EXPECTED TO DROP TO THE 30 PERCENT RANGE. THE PERCENTAGE OF NATIONAL PARTICIPATION IS FURTHER LOWERED BY THE FACT THAT SOME 50 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS BELOW THE VOTING AGE OF 18 YEARS. IN ADDITION, VERY FEW OF THOSE IN THE 18-21 YEAR AGE GROUP, ELIGIBLE FOR THE FIRST TIME TO VOTE, HAVE HAD SUFFICIENT TIME TO RECEIVE THEIR CEDULAS, THE REGISTRATION CARDS REQUIRED FOR ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION.

3. THE OUTLOOK IS FOR CALM AND ORDERLY ELECTIONS. THE STUDENT VIOLENCE WHICH ERUPTED IN LATE MARCH HAS LARGELY SUBSIDED WITH THE APRIL 2 CLOSURE AND MILITARY OCCUPATION OF THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY. WHILE SOME STUDENT DISORDERS AND LABOR UNREST HAVE CONTINUED, THE EVENTS ARE NOT OF A NATURE OF SIZE TO THREATEN THE SUNDAY VOTING.

4. WHILE THE VOTING PROCESS ITSELF SHOULD BE ORDERLY, THE TABULATION OF THE VOTE WILL BE COMPLICATED TO THE POINT OF CHAOS. NATION-WIDE, THERE ARE SOME FIVE THOUSAND ELECTORAL LISTS ENTERED UNDER THE COMPLEX COLOMBIAN SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. IN BOGOTA ALONE, THERE ARE TWENTY FIVE LISTS FROM WHICH TO SELECT MEMBERS OF THE TWO ELECTORAL BODIES. OF THE LISTS, SIX ARE LIBERAL, EIGHT CONSERVATIVE, TWO ANAPISTA, TWO REPRESENT THE SMALL FAR-LEFTIST PARTIES AND SEVEN ARE NON-AFFILIATED.

5. THE PRONOUNCED FACTIONALISM IS HEIGHTENED BY THE FACT THAT THIS YEAR'S MID-TERM ELECTIONS WILL, FOR THE LIBERALS, SERVE AS SOMETHING OF A PRIMARY. THE MAJORITY PARTY HAS RULED THAT HALF OF THE DELEGATES OF THE 1978 CONVENTION WILL BE SELECTED BY THE MUNICIPAL AND DEPARTMENTAL COUNCIL MEMBERS ELECTED THIS YEAR. THUS THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS ARE SEEKING BOTH DELEGATE STRENGTH AND CONCRETE MANIFESTATION OF THEIR VOTER POPULARITY.

6. AMONG THE LIBERALS, FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS APPEARS POSITIONED TO GAIN MOST FROM THE APRIL 18 BALLOTING. HIS VIGOROUS CAMPAIGNING DURING THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE. LLERAS LISTS ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE APPROXIMATELY 45 PERCENT OF THE LIBERAL VOTE. THUS THE PRESTIGIOUS FORMER PRESIDENT WILL GAIN SORELY NEEDED DELEGATE STRENGTH AND DEMONSTRATE ANEW HIS PO-

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BOGOTA 03779 141834Z

PULAR SUPPORT. FOR AMBASSADOR TURBAY, THE ELECTION WILL PROBABLY BE SOMETHING OF A SET-BACK TO HIS PRESIDENTIAL DRIVE. ALTHOUGH HE RETAINS AMPLE DELEGATE STRENGTH, HIS PROBABLE POPULAR SHOWING (IN THE 20 PERCENT RANGE) WILL COMPARE UNFAVORABLY WITH THE MUCH LARGER LLERAS SHOWING. THE OTHER IMPORTANT LIBERAL GROUPING, ESSENTIALLY LOPEZ FOLLOWERS, GATHERED UNDER THE HEADING OF "FIRST FORCE" SHOULD POLL 15-20 PERCENT OF THE LIBERAL VOTE AND PROVIDE THE INCUMBENT PRESIDENT (WHO CANNOT SUCCEED HIMSELF) WITH ADDI-

TIONAL POWER AT THE 1978 CONVENTION.

7. FOR THE CONSERVATIVES, THE MID-TERM TEST DOES NOT OFFER PROMISING PROSPECTS. ALTHOUGH THEY ARE FAR AND AWAY THE LARGEST OPPOSITION PARTY, THEY REMAIN A DISTANT SECOND (33 PERCENT TO 55 PERCENT) TO THE LIBERALS. CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERS BELIEVE THAT A 40 PERCENT SHOWING WOULD REVITALIZE THE PARTY AND GIVE THEM THE CHANCE TO MOUNT A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE LIBERALS IN 1978. FEW OBSERVERS, HOWEVER, EXPECT A 40 PERCENT SHOWING BY THE CONSERVATIVES. INDEED, HANDICAPPED BY THE LACK OF AN ANNOUNCED 1978 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, AND PROBABLY DISPROPORTIONATELY DAMAGED BY THE HOLIDAY TIMING OF THE ELECTIONS, THEY WILL DO WELL TO HOLD THEIR ONE THIRD OF THE VOTE.

8. THE ONLY BENEFICIARIES OF THE HOLIDAY ELECTION SCHEDULE APPEAR TO BE THE PARTIES OF THE FAR LEFT, THE NATIONAL UNION OF OPPOSITION (UNO) AND THE MAOIST-ORIENTED INDEPENDENT AND REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS MOVEMENT (MOIR). THE DISCIPLINE OF THE RADICAL PARTIES AND THE FACT THAT FEW OF THEIR VOTERS CAN AFFORD TO LEAVE TOWN FOR THE EASTER HOLIDAY PERIOD MAY BOOST THE FAR LEFT'S SHOWING ABOVE THE 3 PERCENT THAT IT HAS WON IN THE LAST SEVERAL ELECTIONS.

9. FOR THE NATIONAL POPULAR ALLIANCE (ANAPO) THIS YEAR'S ELECTIONS COULD BE TERMINAL. THE POPULIST MOVEMENT ASSEMBLED BY 1950'S STRONGMAN GENERAL ROJAS PINILLA HAS DECLINED STEADILY SINCE 1970, WHEN THE GENERAL BARELY MISSED DEFEATING NATIONAL FRONT CANDIDATE PASTRANA IN A SOMEWHAT QUESTIONABLE VOTE COUNT. WITH THAT NEAR-MISS AND THE LATER DEBILITATION AND DEATH, IN 1975, OF ROJAS PINILLA, THE PARTY'S FORTUNES HAVE DECLINED STEADILY. WITH THE LACK OF THE GENERAL'S PERSONALISMO, AND WITH THE PARTY DOCTRINE BECOMING INCREASINGLY MORE INCHOATE, THE ANAPISTA'S HAVE LARGELY MOVED BACK TO THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES WHICH THEY HAD LEFT TO SUP-

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PAGE 04 BOGOTA 03779 141834Z

PORT THE GENERAL. IN 1974, ANAPO SUNK TO 9 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. A FURTHER DIMINUTION, WHICH APPEARS LIKELY, COULD MARK THE END OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ABERRATION TO AFFECT THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN MODERN COLOMBIAN HISTORY.
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